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As U.S. Supports Attack, Jordan And Egypt Vow to Press for Peace

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 1 — The White House said today that Israel's attack on the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Tunisia appeared to be "a legitimate response" against "terrorist attacks."

The statement, which seemed to justify the attack, put the United States squarely on the side of Israel in the face of a wave of protests from Arab governments, including those friendly to Washington, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Washington insisted, however, that it had not been consulted by the Israelis or told in advance of the attack by American-made F-15 jet fighters.

'Criminal Act,' Egypt Says

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and King Hussein of Jordan both condemned the attack, but at the same time vowed to continue their efforts to revive the peace process. The Egyptian Government, calling the raid "a criminal act," said it had suspended talks with Israel on the fate of Taba, a beach-front sliver of land in Sinai that has been in dispute for years. The dispute

was believed to be close to resolution. At the United Nations, Tunisia's Foreign Minister, Beji Caid Essebsi, called the raid an act of "state terrorism" intended to sabotage the Middle East peace process. [Page A10.]

In New York, Secretary of State George P. Shultz, at a luncheon with Persian Gulf Foreign Ministers, heard complaints from the Arabs about the Israeli raid.

'We Need to Be Clear'

Mr. Shultz, in a statement that notably did not include any justification for the Israeli attack, said that he was not clear on what happened but that "we need to be clear in our opposition to the acts of violence from whatever quarter they come, and without respect to the presumed rationale for them."

There seemed to be a discrepancy between the White House response and Mr. Shultz's more general condemnation of violence from all sides. But State Department officials insisted that there was no change in Mr.

Shultz's strong antiterrorist policy. They said his comments were designed to assure the Arab Foreign Ministers that the United States' priority remained bringing peace to the Middle East.

After the White House statement, messages were sent around the world today to United States Missions to be particularly alert to terrorist attacks because of the statement in Washington defending the Israeli raid, Administration officials said.

U.S. Calls Action Consistent

In Washington, Administration officials said the White House had decided that the Israeli action seemed consistent with the often-stated American policy of the last two years, in which the United States has threatened, but never taken, retaliation against acts of terrorism.

Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, said: "As a matter of U.S. policy, retaliation against terrorist attacks is a legitimate response and an expression of self-defense. From the preliminary reports available to us, this appears to be what was involved in this case."

A White House official said, "We have a firm antiterrorist policy, and we believe in hitting the terrorists if you know where they are."

Mohammed T. Mehdi, president of the American-Arab Relations Committee, issued a statement today saying that his group was not shocked by the Israeli attack but by "the United States justification of that aggression."

"America has lost whatever credibility it claimed to be impartial in the Middle East conflict," Dr. Mehdi said.

Embarrassment for Hussein

The Israeli attack, which Washington asserted came without any advance consultation with the United States, was somewhat embarrassing because King Hussein, who met with President Reagan on Monday to discuss peace efforts, was still in Washington, conferring with Congressional leaders.

But the Jordanian leader said in an interview that he would not let the Israeli attack halt his peace initiative.

"This is an attempt, no matter how they explain it, to undercut the position of those who favor a negotiated solution to the conflict," he said in a telephone interview. "But I shall continue my efforts to make peace because this raid proves that there is more at stake now than at any other time."

House, King Hussein said that "Jordan recognizes the right of Israel to exist," and he repeated his willingness to have direct and prompt negotiations with Israel, under the auspices of an international conference.

He was praised by several pro-Israel members of Congress for in effect meeting the Congressional conditions for arms sales to Jordan. The Administration announced last week that it was planning to sell Jordan from \$1.55 billion to \$1.9 billion in advanced arms, despite considerable opposition in Congress.

Considerable Discussion in U.S.

The decision by the Administration to defend the Israeli attack on various headquarters buildings of Yasir Arafat's group was made after considerable discussion this morning within the Government.

Some Middle East experts at the State Department were reported to have urged a more even-handed approach, condemning all violence.

The White House and the State Department both said Israel had not informed the United States ahead of time about the attack and had not sought American approval. State Department officials said they believed the raid was carried out by F-15 fighter-bombers.

"We are distressed by and deplore the cycle of violence in the Middle East, of which this latest incident is a part," Mr. Speakes, the White House spokesman, said. "It underscores the urgent need to work for peace in the Middle East. As a matter of United States policy, retaliation against terrorist attacks is a legitimate response and an expression of self-defense. From the preliminary reports available to us, this appears to be what was involved in this case."

"The President has said linking those who commit crime to those who are punished is essential," Mr. Speakes said.

Reagan Defends the Raid

Mr. Reagan himself, at the end of a news conference announcing the nomination of Margaret M. Heckler as Ambassador to Ireland, said today that nations had the right to retaliate against terrorist attacks "as long as you pick out the people responsible."

Both the White House and the State Department said they had no independent intelligence information to confirm the Israeli allegation that Mr. Arafat's group had directed a series of terrorist attacks on Israelis, including the murder of three Israelis by three Palestinians in Cyprus on Yom Kippur last week.

But Mr. Reagan, when asked if the Israelis had picked out the right people, said "Well, I've always had a great faith in their intelligence abilities."

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A White House aide said later that Mr. Reagan was "winging it," that he had no hard intelligence information himself proving that the P.L.O. had organized the murders in Cyprus.

The statement today was in contrast to the criticism leveled by the Administration in 1981 after Israel's surprise attack on an Iraqi nuclear reactor outside of Baghdad. After that attack, the United States held up delivery of some planes to Israel and noted that the Israelis seemed to be in violation of American law that bars the use of American military equipment except in self-defense.

Congress had passed a law that required the President to certify that Jordan recognized Israel's right to exist and was committed to negotiate promptly and directly with Israel.